Tug of War

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Tug of War

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

It's hard for Hannibal to believe Will is unaware of his own transcendent beauty, but the profiler is desperately insecure in the romantic realm. One little complication? Will's insecurity doesn't make him any less passionately ambitious for landing the two men he's in love with: Hannibal Lecter and the Chesapeake Ripper.

Having put the pieces together about Dr. Lecter and the Ripper being one and the same, Will sets out to tease and seduce them both, especially driving Hannibal crazy with jealousy. What will it take to break down Hannibal's deception and defenses and get him to confess everything to Will? 👀

Notes

Thanks to Alisha for conceiving and sharing such a delightful prompt and introducing me to the fic, "Jealous of Myself" by Yvaine_Evenstar, which was a joy to read, too! 💚

See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by Jealous of Myself by Yvaine_Evenstar

This is how it works

“this is how it works
You peer inside yourself
You take the things you like
And try to love the things you took
And then you take that love you made
And stick it into some
Someone else's heart
Pumping someone else's blood
And walking arm in arm
You hope it don't get harmed
But even if it does
You'll just do it all again” - Regina Spektor

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Will had a recurring dream about the Chesapeake Ripper, the dark, looming, severe stagman who had invaded his subconscious mind as thoroughly as his daytime thoughts.

In the dream, the Ripper – *his,* Will’s Ripper – pulled his still-beating heart from his ribcage, carved it into a rose, and put it back. And his heart, bleeding and changed to fit the Ripper’s design, beat harder than ever.

And Will kept waking up in a cold sweat, almost shockingly hard. Starving, too…he felt absolutely voracious.

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He’d had his suspicions about Hannibal, of course, almost from the beginning. Who could ignore the obvious fact that this man fit the Ripper profile to a tee? Well, Jack and Alana could, actually. Will sometimes used this to try and dissuade himself, but each time he pushed his theories about Dr. Lecter’s secret life as a vicious killer out of his mind, something shoved them right back to the forefront.

Finally, torn between his slow-burning, strangely edifying feelings for the Ripper and his growing, bewildering, powerful regard for Hannibal, Will felt he had no choice but to equate the two. Empathy and plain old common sense made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end and goosebumps break out on his skin if he spent too much time with Hannibal…and he was always spending too much time with Hannibal. He liked it.

He liked thinking about the Ripper, too, immersing himself in the deep, treacherous waters of the killer’s gruesome tableaus, his inimitable, fascinating vision of the world, one Will could never dismiss as devoid of value. Some days, the Ripper’s idea of living, with flesh in his teeth and the lives of others in his grip to do with as he pleased made more sense to Will than any other.

Enticed by the Ripper, fascinated by Hannibal, frightened by both, only wanting more. Will decided that he was either in love with two different men, or else he was in love with one and the same. He had to know for sure, but he still harbored a paranoid fear that either or both might not return his passionate feelings. At least if he knew who, precisely, he was dealing with, maybe Will could evolve a better plan to confront them, and…this vast sea of desire.

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The first time it had occurred to him that Hannibal might be the Ripper was also the first time he saw his therapist cooking at home. Will felt a surge of excited arousal, immediately followed by a stab of guilt, all wrapped up in terror.

Over a few months that followed, Will worked through his guilt and absolved himself. Ironically, Hannibal's therapy, always encouraging him to make friends with his dark side and become "comfortable with himself" was just what Will needed to make peace with his love of bloody justice outside the law, with the Ripper's art, with being in love with his potentially dangerous, even deadly, closest friend.

Since that revelation, Will began peppering their therapy sessions and social interactions with small, but pointed questions, carefully compiling the clues and signs as if Hannibal was a book in some other language which only Hannibal could translate to whoever proved worthy.

And Will wanted to be worthy, but he didn't believe he should have to be much more patient.

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Will decided that he needed more than just proof Hannibal was the Ripper (by month four of knowing the man, he was about ninety percent sure of his theory). He needed proof that Hannibal and the Ripper loved him. Hannibal, the Ripper. Whatever. He needed to know.

He couldn't bear the thought of humiliating himself with another unrequited desire; this was so much more *feeling* than he'd ever had for Alana; this love he felt for his Ripper and the elegant, handsome, caring man who the Ripper masqueraded as by day had enveloped his whole being, every thought and emotion. How could he just hold that in his outstretched hands to let Hannibal potentially smash it all to pieces, this, the most he'd ever felt, the beautifully violent dream that consumed him?

Will was more afraid of that, of being rejected by both incarnations of his lover, than he was afraid of either version killing him. At least that would be an honor. He'd also prefer that, if he wasn't loved in return.

In order to try and make Hannibal give him harder evidence that he also had a "crush" on Will, it remained to find some way to get through his defenses. Will had a feeling that a lot of burning hot passion simmered under his therapist's ever-serene surface, and that if he kept pushing on the right pressure points, he could make it explode, become its happy recipient.

He wanted to be the one person who made Hannibal lose it, go *crazy,* he wanted Hannibal in a state of frenzied possessiveness about *him*. The thought made Will feel dizzy.

So, he came up with the idea of letting Hannibal know he was "moving on" from his feelings for Alana (which he'd actually done ages ago) and wanted to begin "dating" again.

Let's see how he likes that! Maybe I can make the almighty Dr. Lecter – and very likely the powerful Chesapeake Ripper – humanly, insanely – jealous. All for me.

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The bait

"Will," Hannibal smiled cordially – *too* cordially – at 7:30pm when their second session of the week began. He gestured grandly, warmly, for Will to "Please. Come in."

Will hated, and hid that he hated, only coming here on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Even though Hannibal frequently visited him in Wolf Trap for friendly reasons, or invited Will to his house for dinner, lines had never been crossed and he had the continual feeling that he was in an unending desert, dying of thirst, while Hannibal was a font of the sweetest, most enriching and delectable wine. Once uncorked, that wine would flow forever, but until Will opened his beloved, he would remain perilously thirsty and in need. Perhaps they both would.

Hannibal was his only sustenance in a world which otherwise interested Will very little.

And tonight, there was his therapist, so damn calm again, so totally fine seeing his friend Will, as if all his emotion regarding the younger man was platonic and revolved around caring for his previously fragile mental health.

Will had also been concealing how much he'd grown in that respect. Falling in love with the Ripper and Hannibal had taught him to stop hating himself; he felt that love unleashing his own forbidden urges, and there was no room left for guilt or regret over who he was.

He wasn't in pieces anymore on account of hating himself, just because of loving Hannibal and loving the Ripper. Will's impatience possibly made him nudge his friend a little too hard to get at the truth, but hey, when had Hannibal ever hesitated to do the same when he had a curiosity about Will?

So, Will let the usual pleasantries pass between them, waiting until they were sitting down and beginning to discuss his life, before he dropped the well-planned bomb.

"I've decided that I am going to begin dating again." Will put one finger on his glasses, pushing them back into place, trying not to laugh at the silliness of his own statement. What *again?*

"Dating?" Hannibal inquired, as if the word was the filthiest, most offensive curse he had ever heard, his eyebrows shooting up and lips pursing before he could catch himself and compose his expression.

"Yes." Will was glad he'd dressed in his nicest pressed shirt and trousers, slicking back his curls and wearing a better aftershave for this session.

He'd never seen his friend's face fall like that. And there it was! For a second it came back, the spark of jealousy he recognized from the night he'd told the older man about kissing Alana. Now he was getting somewhere.

No turning back.

"It's time for me to find a partner, someone to make my life full and happy," Will smiled. He couldn't have been more honest about this. "I've decided that not only is this something I want and need, but I deserve it, too."

Now, he thought he had better stop hiding that he was feeling more confident. The "poor Will Graham" act wasn't going to sell the idea that he was going to go out and find some other lover, leaving Hannibal in the dust. Of course, he'd rather die than be with someone else, but his instincts told him he needed to keep the power in their dynamic on his own side for a while.

If Hannibal realized Will was weak with love and desire for him, it would allow him to toy with the younger man and keep the upper hand. Will got the feeling Hannibal was genuinely afraid of being vulnerable, so it was definitely necessary to push him a bit.

"I might have known by the way you've been dressing lately that some new resolve had dictated a change." Hannibal stood and crossed from their usual chairs to his desk, arranging a few things that already seemed to be in the right places.

Will repressed a satisfied smile at his friend's trademark, small signs of nervousness. Hannibal was as adorable as he was hot, sexy, dangerous, mysterious and intriguing. It was actually a bit funny that the man really thought Will could go out and seriously date someone else.

"Guess you're right," He said with a breathy sigh, as if he'd been caught out, instead of deviously scheming on his own side. "I just thought a new look might do more than potentially attract a soulmate. Maybe it would make me take more pride in myself, too, and well…it's been working. Hopefully I don't look dreadfully insincere, like I ought to be wearing flannel and denim but put on airs of something more elegant."

"Oh, heavens, no," Hannibal said with a tight smile. "You look happy, healthy, and well-dressed. Of course, you should treat yourself with the same regard you deserve and would seek in a lover."

"I'm not exactly *happy*," Will admitted, biting his lip. He moved his hand indecisively then put it on the armrest with an absent-minded stroke. "Not yet. I think I'll be happy when I find them, silly as it may sound. 'The One.'"

"You've made tremendous strides, Will," Hannibal said, his tone clearly intended to be warm and encouraging, but it came out stiff and regretful. "The young man I first met several months ago in Jack Crawford's office didn't have the self-esteem or confidence to search for a soulmate. I think we should drink to this wonderful development."

“Oh, sure,” Will grinned, blushing at the praise. “Thank you, Dr. Lecter, I’m glad you approve of my decision.”

He was fully capable of basking in the doctor’s compliments *and* twisting the knife in Hannibal’s heart at the same time. Hannibal wasn’t the only one who excelled at multitasking.

Hannibal did *not* approve of Will’s decision; to Will’s quiet elation and triumph, the doctor’s eyes flashed with silent disapproval and even anger, definitely frustration. Who was he mad at? Will wondered with joyful, affectionate amusement.

Was Hannibal angry at himself for not making a move on Will sooner? Was he mad at the people Will might go out with, who he might fall for? He guessed it was a combination of these factors.

“Absolutely,” Hannibal smiled, making a visible effort to do so more naturally that only somewhat succeeded.

He’d taken out a nice-looking bottle of pink wine and a corkscrew, which he now kept himself busy with, avoiding eye contact with Will. “I couldn’t be happier for you.”

Hannibal, avoiding Will’s eyes…how the tables had turned.

“Perfect!” Will enthused. “You’ll be glad to hear that I already have a date for tomorrow night. I ventured onto a dating app, believe it or not, and got quite a few ‘yes’ swipes. This guy seems terrific – he’s a veterinarian –”

Hannibal looked up at Will the second he said ‘this guy,’ mouth hanging open in surprised horror, and at the same time, he let go of the bottle of rose´, causing it to smash on the office floor – loudly.

“Oh, no!” Will made himself say, covering up another delighted laugh. “Let me help you. I shouldn’t distract you with news when you’re doing that. Sharp objects and all…it could have been worse.”

“I can open a bottle of wine,” Hannibal said sternly, looking down at the drops of pink wine on his plaid suit. He took out his pocket square handkerchief and dabbed at it.

“Please, remain where you are, Will. I’d hate for you to be cut or slip on the….” he sighed. “Wine.”

Will wondered when the last time was that Hannibal had broken anything by accident, and if he ever actually *had* before now. It was hard not to feel smug.

His therapist’s cheeks were pinker than the wine as he retrieved a broom and dustpan from a closet nearby and started cleaning up broken glass. “I can’t imagine what came over me,” he added tightly.

Will shrugged. “Well…I startled you. That’s okay. I never mentioned to you before that I’m bisexual.”

Hannibal frowned at the thick shards of the expensive wine bottle as he cleaned up. They made an angry clattering noise as they were scraped into the dustpan.

“And why do you think that would shock me?”

“Not shock, exactly,” Will smiled kindly. “I really only meant ‘startled.’ Since we met, I think the only person I mentioned having feelings for was Alana.”

Hannibal finished with the broom and cleaned up the smaller shards with one of those tiny little dustbusters (of course he had one), then got several paper towels and started soaking up the worst of the wine from his previously perfect rug.

“Let us embrace a sense of relief that that era is over,” Hannibal replied, as if trying to get himself to look on the bright side.

“Relief?” Will repeated, feigning surprise.

He batted his long, dark lashes as Hannibal glanced up, on hands and knees cleaning wine from the rug. His strong, toned body looked amazing from this angle, Will noticed, *Wow.*

Their gazes locked and Will’s heart skipped a beat. *I want you, my Ripper,* Will’s eyes said.

“I never thought Alana would be good for you in that way,” Hannibal explained frankly.

For the moment, he seemed almost heartbreakingly open and honest, but as usual, it passed quickly and his defenses went back up.

“If she wouldn’t be good for me, then who would?” Will asked.

“I can only hope that you will find that out soon,” Hannibal answered, “You deserve happiness, Will.”

So, once again, Will gave him an opening to express his own feelings, and Hannibal opted to give a vague, generic answer with a few possible interpretations. This was getting old. Hannibal needed someone to unlock that suffocating suit of armor protecting his emotions, and Will was more than up to the job.

“You deserve to be happy, too, Dr. Lecter,” Will said thoughtfully.

“Thank you,” Hannibal said, looking just a tiny bit awkward for a second. He forced another weak excuse for a smile that melted Will’s heart all over again.

The doctor added, with that pasted-on smile, “Now then, why don’t I open up another bottle, and we can finally have that celebratory drink?”

Will nodded slowly, pressing his sweaty palms to his thighs. He knew Hannibal was absorbing his every move, and that Hannibal was now the one out in the desert, starving for Will’s attention. The younger man liked the feeling, but intended it to be temporary.

“Of course, Dr. Lecter,” he said calmly. “Whatever you think would be appropriate in the circumstances.”

If you’re sure you don’t want to kiss me or at least admit you’re in love with me…

Meanwhile, his empathy told him Hannibal was screaming inside with baffled, overwhelmed and very upset feelings. All in due time…Will would know every bit of what lived in Hannibal Lecter’s heart.

And he would have it for his own.

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Will only went on the date so he could tell Hannibal about it with realistic stories. He never actually dated (more the type for occasional, awkward hook-ups) and didn’t think he could give a believable account otherwise.

Quickly, however, he regretted the decision. Making up a story, however flimsy, would have been preferable to listening to *Dave* for two goddamn hours.

One of Will’s biggest weaknesses had always been his overly polite nature and the difficulty he had in extricating himself from situations he despised. It made no sense this time, as Dave had very obviously decided he did not like and wasn’t interested in Will within about ten minutes.

But Will’s manners stuck to him like superglue, and he couldn’t bring himself to get up, tell Dave where to go, and hightail it home, where he could complain to his dogs about it. Therefore, he saw the date through to its pathetic conclusion.

First, Will got lost trying to find the obscure, snobby little bar Dave had chosen, and then when he finally got there, sweaty, out of breath, having pretty much ruined his date outfit, Dave was irritated with him for being late.

They walked towards the bar, and within a mere few footsteps Dave managed to push Will further away and announce his own growing distaste for Will at the same time. The *bad kind of multitasking.*

Will hadn’t wanted a love connection, but thought at the worst he might make a new friend. This was most definitely *never* going to be a friendship.

“So, what do you usually drink? I remember you’re a whiskey fan,” Dave declared, walking into the bar without holding the door for Will.

This meant that Will had to stop short and open the door before he could go in and answer.

“Um. I like Evan Williams Black,” Will said flatly, arriving beside Dave as the man examined the drink menu over the bar with an even more egotistical attitude than the bar itself boasted (an amazing feat; this place was incredibly pretentious, not in the intriguing Hannibal way, either).

“Ugh!” Dave scowled as if Will had spat in his cereal. “That *swill?* You can do better. I mean, *god*, just buy Henry McKenna Single Barrel, it’s cheap and has a decent flavor anyway.”

Will laughed sharply. “*What?* That stuff costs $75 a bottle! I can’t afford that.”

They found a table as if they were a divorced couple forced to spend time together. Such, Will realized, was the modern dating world: chat with a stranger on one’s phone, make yourself go meet them, then survive the mind-numbing doldrums of “getting to know” someone who never held any real interest, anyway.

Dating had become mandatory to prove one did not plan to remain single forever, but this kind of experience made Will incredibly grateful he already knew who his soulmate was. No Tinder or Bumble would be needed, no further, miserable dates with the Daves of the world, who seemed to number in the hundreds within the Virginia- Maryland area alone.

First, he had to survive Dave, as he needed the story. He reminded himself of this as he gritted his teeth at the man’s condescending resting bitch face.

“Really?” Dave said coldly. “You’re how old again?”

He just could not fathom that a criminal psychology professor and occasional FBI profiler in his mid-thirties wasn’t making the kind of money he did as a fucking *doctor.* The worst part was that Dave was a veterinarian. Will would *never* bring his own dogs to be cared for by such a mean, vapid man.

After faking it through the rest of the date – (i.e. pretending he didn’t want to kill Dave and save himself from hearing one more mocking, “disappointed” comment at his own expense) Will didn’t relish the idea of finding his car again. He didn’t know this neighborhood of Baltimore at all, and the only thing Dave was good for was walking him back. At least he didn’t have to do it alone and get lost again. Especially since it was Dave’s idea to meet here, after Will warned him he had no sense of direction, it was obviously the least he could–

“Anyway, have a good night,” Dave said absent-mindedly when they left the bar. He chuckled. “Good luck finding your car,” and then he went walking off in the opposite direction from the one Will had arrived in.

“That fucking *asshole,*” Will muttered, infuriated. “The *nerve!*”

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Hannibal’s eyes were stinging and wet, which of course was the result of the fireplace he sat near, and not a by-product of crying.

A book lay open and neglected on his leg, and he was toying absent-mindedly with the sleeves of his velvety, red bathrobe, not even realizing he had tugged at loose strings until the whole thing was in danger of fraying.

Was Will truly going out on a date with some other man right now? Hannibal was going out, too. Of his *mind,* at the mere suggestion!

He had always assumed he could control the situation with Will by manipulating this patient the same way he did the others. But Will wasn't like anyone else; the only person he was like was Hannibal.

Now, apparently, despite months of carefully placed, subtle, seductive hints, Will saw Dr. Lecter only as his therapist and friend. How had they ended up here?

In danger of humiliating himself by calling Will to see how the date went (and make sure Will was alright, too – for all they knew, his date could be some horrible miscreant, this was a total stranger!) Hannibal instead jolted upright when the doorbell suddenly rang.

The simple, cheerful "ding-dong!" had shattered the depressing night of wallowing, so far only accompanied by the dreariest classical music and the quiet crackling of the fire.

He stood with a small, startled sound which he was relieved no one else heard, belted his robe politely and went to see who on earth would call on him at…he glanced at his watch. 10:30pm. Oh. Had he only been wallowing for three hours? It felt longer.

Hannibal didn't know whether to feel irritation or gratitude at the interruption. He did concoct a whole fantasy en route from the library to the front door, involving Will showing up to beg his forgiveness for "cheating" on him in this awful way. Hannibal, in this scenario, was willing to be generous and forgiving. But what met his eyes was not quite what he had hoped for.

Will was leaning on the house, breathing hard, half-hunched over. He seemed to have been assaulted, as his face was bruised. Behind him, Hannibal noticed a taxi driving away, apparently having deposited the injured boy at his address.

Shocked, genuinely, Hannibal blurted, "Will, what happened?" and reached out, guiding his patient tenderly into the house.

Will, it appeared, could only stumble by way of walking. He had a black eye and a cut on his cheek beneath it, a bloodied lip, and he was moving as if he'd had the wind knocked out of him.

"Sorry, I didn't know where else to go," Will sighed, pain in his voice. He leaned on Hannibal, who led him to the dining room table and helped him to sit down. "I hate hospitals."

"I'm glad you came to me." Hannibal knelt by Will and took his hand gently. "Who did this to you? Was it your date?"

He was going to absolutely *destroy* this man who had taken Will out and hurt him. Nobody touched Will Graham except for Hannibal, and the idea of someone *else* hurting Will, bruising his soft alabaster skin, bringing tears of pain into his bright blue eyes, grabbing him by the hair, drawing blood? It made Hannibal almost feral with possessive rage.

Will Graham was *his* to hurt, and his alone. Will was his territory.

“I…” Will seemed to come to his senses more.

He looked down, noticing Hannibal’s soft appearance, his messy hair, bathrobe and cozy, concerned demeanor. Will also felt the warmth of Hannibal’s larger hand encompassing his own as if it was truly precious and so was he.

“No, it wasn’t Dave, my date,” Will explained, “It was…”

So. *Dave,* was it? Hannibal’s lip curled. He’d wheedle a last name out of Will by the evening’s end, so he could give the man a suitable visit later on.

“Don’t push yourself – let me get you a glass of water, and my first aid supplies to deal with your injuries,” Hannibal suggested, wrapped in a blaring cacophony of anger, protectiveness and lust that had him dying inside.

He soon returned with a tall glass of water, which Will drank slowly, as instructed. And as Hannibal set about cleaning his wounds, then applying small bandages, Will told the sad tale of his date night.

Every time Hannibal touched Will with his bare hands, an exquisite torture of need pulsed through him to the core; meanwhile, the boy unfolded a story that made his violent side almost impossible to contain.

“So what did happen with this…Dave?” He prompted, the name disgusting and poisonous on his tongue.

“Um, yeah, yeah, sorry, so…Dave turned out to be a jerk as well, but he isn’t the one who did this.” Will gestured ruefully at his pretty face, now black, blue and dotted in sweet red blood. Never more beautiful or kissable.

“What an unfortunate evening,” Hannibal remarked.

“You think? I guess this is what I get for venturing into the dating world.” Will barked a cynical laugh. “So, Dave wanted to meet at some bar in a part of the city I’ve never been to. He walked off to let me find my own way back to my car after our terrible date, and I got lost for the second time. I still never found my damn car, by the way. Before I could, a thief jumped me. I was *mugged.*”

“Did the police come to your aid?” Hannibal asked hurriedly, almost dropping the cotton balls and bandages in his shocked anger.

“Nah, it was a completely quiet, empty part of the – it was a backstreet, I guess. And let me assure you, I used to be a cop, I can hold my own.” Pridefully, he pointed out, “I would have given him one hell of a fight, but he caught me unawares, knocked me out from behind.”

“A miracle you did not get a concussion.” Hannibal frowned, feeling the back of Will’s head and finding a large bump under the soft, lovely curls. Fire and brimstone entered his tone as he added, “We shall run tests together shortly to make absolutely sure you did not.”

“Okay,” Will nodded, hastening to finish the story. “Not much more to tell. I woke up without a wallet – luckily, he didn’t take the twenty in my jeans’ pocket or I wouldn’t have made it here in the cab. Then I discovered that my face had been *worked over,* as they say in the old noir films. Talk about insult to injury. He had no reason to do that; already robbed me and I was knocked out cold on the sidewalk. I guess he just didn’t like my face, whoever it was.”

“Anyone who doesn’t like your face is a fool.” Hannibal spoke before he could stop himself, framing Will’s face in one hand as he smoothed a bandage over one of the cuts with his other.

Instinctively, his thumb moved, stroking Will’s bottom lip. Thunderous lust and craving roared through him, once again forcibly but barely contained.

“Oh…thanks, Dr. Lecter.” Will smiled, gave a bashful little laugh, and otherwise drove Hannibal out of what remained of his mind.

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“From now on,” Hannibal advised sternly, “If you intend to enter an unfamiliar area of the city, you are to ask me for directions. I will talk you through it over the phone, if needed; I would even be more than happy to drop you off at your destination.”

“Drop me off…at my *dates?*” Will asked, touching his forehead as if questioning whether he did have a concussion after all.

“Better that, than you coming into further injury or worse danger alone.”

Will was sitting in the chair opposite Hannibal’s, as he usually did in their sessions, but this time he was in the softly dark, quietly enthralling environment of the doctor’s own home, his private world.

“I think I’ve probably had my fill of dating already,” Will sighed. “This was an informative experience, not something I care to repeat.”

“I doubt all future dates would be quite so unpleasantly eventful.”

Hannibal folded his hands on his lap, doing his best to hide how they trembled. He was ecstatic to hear that Will had no further plans to date strangers, or indeed anyone not named Hannibal Lecter.

And yet, the knowledge that he couldn’t reveal his love tonight weighed on him like lead in his heart. He still didn’t trust himself to be that vulnerable, and did not know for certain if Will reciprocated his desperate adoration. So, he must continue waiting until he had proof and could definitively “make his move.”

That was what one did…right?

“Maybe not,” Will laughed, “Yet, I don’t see the point. Trying to go out with someone new only reminded me that I haven’t gotten over the person I *really* like…I mean, more than like. I’m in love…”

“You’re still in love with Alana?” Hannibal scoffed, unable to help the reaction.

“No, I don’t think I was ever in love with her. No, Dr. Lecter, there’s someone else who has been on my mind and in my heart intensely, for a few months now. I think I can’t be happy with anyone else. Going to this date was like walking to my death, even when I thought Dave might be a nice guy, and maybe we could be friends. I felt…bored, uninterested…I even felt a little unfaithful. I knew it was wrong of me the whole time.”

“Yet, you’re not in a relationship with this secret object of desire?”

Hannibal could have screamed. Was Will seriously telling him, right after giving such great relief, that this entire time, he had already been in love with yet another *not-Hannibal* person?

“No, I…haven’t been able to share my feelings with him. I’ve tried to flirt a little bit, though our interactions are limited, in a complicated way.”

HIM? Not this again. And even worse this time! Not merely a date with another man, but *love?*

The thought of a woman touching his Will was bad enough, but the idea of a *man* doing so was far, far worse. Hannibal knew Will had only limited sexual experience with men, and wanted so deeply to be the first man to “deflower” him that if he could not earn the privilege, he certainly would not stand for anyone else to do it. Some…unworthy pig, incapable of loving Will properly, as they would obviously be!

Hannibal had never been through a night of so many extreme highs and lows, and it did not appear that he would be ending on a high note.

“Why not make your feelings known?” He asked carefully, biting the inside of his mouth hard afterwards, not even reacting outwardly to the pain.

He tasted his own blood and wished it was Will’s, wished to be licking and kissing the boy’s wounds. Why was fate so cruel?

That was the real question.

“I can’t. Not until I know he loves me, too. I guess, on top of the complications of our relationship as it exists now, which are certainly multilayered, I can’t handle another rejection. It would be a million times worse being rejected by someone I really love. You see, Dr. Lecter…it would be like a double rejection, twice the pain.”

Hannibal’s brow furrowed. Was this incomparably baffling boy sending him coded messages in these statements?

“Tell me about this relationship, perhaps I can offer some good advice.”

Will wrapped the blanket around his shoulders more snugly, sipped the hot cocoa which Hannibal had given him, marshmallows and all, and thought for a moment. His expression was a sort of gently calculating one that further confused Hannibal.

“I think the only way to tell you is to be blunt. Or you won’t understand. I’m in love, Dr. Lecter, with…The Chesapeake Ripper.”

Hannibal decided that he had been wrong about the outcome of this night. He was apparently going to be ending it on outrageously high and low notes at the same time.

***

Ask me to stay

The next day, Will called for an “emergency love life therapy session.” Hannibal was not surprised. After Will had fallen asleep in his guest room the night before, with the aid of painkillers supplied by his trusted doctor, Hannibal had gone straight to the neighborhood where Will had his date earlier.

There, he tracked down the thief by means of surveying the area; the criminal who had attacked Will was apparently making the rounds of the alleys and backstreets, and the red marks on his knuckles attested to his guilt. The pattern matched the wounds on Hannibal’s precious boy’s perfect face, and the consequences were therefore dire.

From there, it was a fast and easy path to Dave’s apartment. Hannibal slipped in and out unseen in the building; everyone was asleep. When he was done, he had a sense of accomplishment, but not the relief he’d hoped for.

All the same, he was rapturously excited to think what he had done might please and impress Will. The Ripper side of Hannibal did have his own special means of courtship, and when the human side was feeling distress, a trail of carnage was inevitable. Everything that Will made him feel came out that night, expressed in grisly art, muffled screams of horror, broken bones and blood puddles. This time, he had no need to take trophies; he was actually too distracted for that. Instead, he left a love letter of sorts for Will.

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Jack had called Will to the crime scene bright and early, confused to learn that Will was at Dr. Lecter’s house. His suspicion of their relationship crossing appropriate boundaries eased up once Will explained about the attack.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Will, that’s a rotten hand to get dealt on your night off,” Jack said on the phone. “Do you need the day to recover?”

“No, I’m fine,” Will chirped, “You said it’s the Ripper?”

Hannibal had made Will breakfast and coffee, everything lovely and sweet, and Will adored these gestures, wondering what other ones awaited him in the neighborhood of his ill-fated date with Dave.

The two men chatted for a bit, then Hannibal had to head out to the office, so he drove Will to the crime scene. On the way there, they found Will’s car; Hannibal insisted on circling the block until they located it. Will blushed at the way the older man took care of him and even reminded him about simple, yet important necessities. These things, like getting his car back,

easily slipped through the cracks due to his overcrowded mind. And later, he would have been upset, realizing that he needed to get home to the dogs and had no way to do so.

“I appreciate you always looking out for me, Dr. Lecter,” Will said with a soft smile when Hannibal parked near the alleyway with the police tape all over it. “Nobody else ever did that.”

“Does it feel good to you, Will, having me take care of you?” Hannibal asked. His breath caught, and his amber eyes were so pretty and bright, Will’s breath did, too.

Will got the impression that Hannibal was going further than he ever had in his romantic implications, in order to balance out whatever the Ripper had done. This would only entrap Will in the “love triangle” holding pattern, which was not Will’s long term plan. He’d let Hannibal linger in his baffled indecision for a little longer, but if the doctor didn’t lay claim on him soon, Will was ready to take more drastic measures.

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“Both tableaus were…well, they were sort of valentines, clearly intended for me,” Will said, trying not to brag until he remembered that *Hannibal* was the Ripper, the giver of his special gifts from the crime scenes, and so most likely wouldn’t be offended so much as delighted.

“Clearly?” Hannibal asked, almost indignant, again as if he struggled to hold in his conflicted reaction to Will’s besotted description.

Did Hannibal sometimes forget that he was the Ripper, too? Will watched his therapist carefully as they sat and discussed the matter in the comfortable leather chairs that had witnessed so many intriguing exchanges of words and body language on the way to this very afternoon, so close to full confession. It felt momentous to Will.

No…Will thought Hannibal was insecure, worried that Will would only love his Ripper side, and reject the human one. What a fool! He didn’t even give Will a chance to know and love him. How long was he really planning to hide his feelings in the shadows to protect a heart he had probably handed to Will on a silver platter some time ago?

With a bizarre combination of excitement and frustration, Will continued, “Yes, I know the tableaus are for me. The Ripper has a special regard for me, always has. And we understand one another. Remember when I told you about my recurring dreams, the ones with the stagman?”

“*Your* stagman, as you called him,” Hannibal mused, rubbing the arms of his chair, then taking a moment to press his lips together, considering his next words. “At the time, I thought you were describing a nightmare.”

“A beautiful one,” Will smiled, “The one I’ve waited for all my life. He carved their hearts to make something truly special just for me. Carved them into roses, covered the men in thorny vines, cut them all over. They drowned in their own blood, choked on it. Roses in their throats.”

“But…that sounds exactly like the imagery you described in your dream.”

Wow, Hannibal was quite the actor. Will repressed an urge to roll his eyes and laugh.

“See? That’s how I know he and I are bonded by our love. He even comes into my dreams. He brings them into the real world. Think of his power, Hannibal, he can bend reality itself to his design. Is it any wonder he has such power over me?”

Hannibal’s facial expression contorted for several seconds before he looked merely displeased or disapproving.

“You really believe that?”

Will was torturing Hannibal, tearing him in two between joy at Will’s infatuation with the monster inside, and fear that the mere human he also was might prove disappointing by comparison. Was this why Hannibal became the Ripper in the first place, to elevate himself to another plane?

Will could elevate him anytime. With nothing more than his hands, his lips, his eager body. It was all he could think of anymore, and there Hannibal was still acting like the world’s biggest idiot who was afraid of love and risked losing it instead of risking his heart.

“I do,” Will said, slowing down his speech, really drawling now. He sat up straighter and smoldered at his intended lover. “I believe in him. He is my destiny. Are you…*judging* me, Dr. Lecter?”

Hannibal looked stern again, this time flicking his gaze over Will’s neatly styled hair and the open collar of his pressed black shirt, the tight fit of his smooth, dark wash jeans. Back up to Will’s vivid eyes staring back, and to his patient’s plush lips as Will slowly wetted them with his tongue.

“It’s hardly a reach to note that you are going against everything you stand for, every morality which you told me emphatically dictated your decisions, in falling for the killer you were assigned to catch.”

Will shrugged. “I *am* catching him. For myself. I’ll catch him and keep him.”

“This is not one of your charming little fishing expeditions, Will.”

Now, Hannibal was being condescending about fishing, and Will did *not* appreciate it.

No need to take digs at my hobbies just because you don’t want to talk about what’s actually going on here. Humph.

“If it was,” Will snipped, standing with a haughty look down at the older man. “Then I’d have a lucky go of it. Never forget, I’m a good fisherman, doctor.”

“Are you leaving?” Hannibal asked, perplexed. “But this is the emergency love life therapy session *you* called for.”

“I thought you’d be helpful and kind like you usually are,” Will said, buttoning his jacket up and putting a hand on the doorknob. “But instead, you’re treating me like a pariah all of a

sudden."

"Will, please, you're overreacting," Hannibal said, standing as well and going to Will, whose hand dropped from the knob.

"Am I? Why's that? Got anything to tell me?" Will cocked his head to one side, crossed his arms and added, for the first time, "*Hannibal?*"

Hannibal visibly took a long inhale of Will's high-end aftershave, as if he thought Will was about to walk out of his life and he wanted to remember how he fucking *smelled*. For God's sake, this man was obnoxiously lovable down to the last dumbass detail!

"Merely that the last thing I intended was to offend you or hurt your feelings. I'm… concerned about where you are bestowing your affections. You're endangering yourself, gravely."

"But that's the point. And you know that." Will felt like poking him in the chest, but refrained, settling for another steely glare. "Tell me, do you even have someone in your life who you love the way the Ripper loves me? He risked *everything* to say that he loves me, he twisted his victims into love letters because he can't get me off his mind. He adores me, he's obsessed with me, and it's intoxicating. I want the danger. You can't hold me back…"

"It isn't that I wish to hold you back from anything you truly desire," Hannibal began, exasperated.

Hannibal looked ridiculously handsome in his cozy, yet dignified navy sweater and nice black pants, a particularly "Daddy" mode of attire that accordingly made Will want to pounce on him, wrap his arms and legs around the man and never let go. He'd have to be peeled off.

But he had no intention of *pouncing* until Hannibal met him halfway.

"You just want to advise me to look before I leap? Well, it's too late. I already jumped to my doom, and I've never been happier. If you'll excuse me…goodnight, Dr. Lecter. I'll be open to speaking with you later, once I calm down."

"Will!" Hannibal attempted to stop him, but didn't try hard enough.

Will wanted to be *chased.* He wanted Hannibal Lecter to be obsessed with him, greedy for Will's love and sex, for Hannibal to admit he hung on Will's every word and move. He did not want to be left on the outside of his beloved's locked up world, not anymore. It had become intolerable.

But despite Will's frustration, there was one silver lining. At least this entire affair was also pretty damn funny. Will wished he had photos of some of the appalled expressions Hannibal had worn since he began telling stories of his "dating" life and falling for the Ripper.

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As Will had planned and expected, a penitent Hannibal Lecter showed up later that night, at the Wolf Trap house, holding a bouquet of red roses, of all things.

“A symbolic gesture?” Will asked, looking and feeling soft in his plaid pj’s and glasses, his hair still a bit damp from his shower. He smelled like soap and his own vulnerability, dammit.

Seeing the man he loved on his doorstep with flowers and a heartfelt apology was enough to defeat Will’s resistance. He let Hannibal come inside.

“Of sorts. A dethorned peace offering.” Hannibal folded his brown leather gloves over his arm and walked in his usual princely, self-protecting, egotistical manner into Will’s snug little home.

All the same, he belonged with Will, and blended into the environment automatically. He and Will were in sync. The dogs recognized and greeted the guest fondly, and Will had already started pouring them each a glass of whiskey.

Hannibal was welcome, in other words. Always. He could come in from the rain of his self-imposed emotional exile whenever he was ready.

“I don’t mind thorns.” Will passed Hannibal his glass, making sure their hands touched.

Touching Hannibal, even briefly, made warm shivers break out all over Will’s body; he wanted to climb into Hannibal’s lap and have at him; he was bursting at the seams with unstoppable love. Was it one-sided or what?

“Some would say I’m thornier than most, if you get to know me intimately.” Hannibal sat down with a sigh.

His chair in front of the space heater was much closer to Will’s own than the chairs in his office. Will could feel his warm, strong body so close to him, could smell the older man’s spicy, mysterious cologne. Hannibal was so handsome it hurt not to tear his clothes off and kiss him until they both fainted.

“Some would say I have a right to decide where to bestow my intimate affections. If the affection’s reciprocated, I hope the person would trust me enough to tell me so.”

Hannibal took a long sip. “Are we talking about your Ripper again, Will?”

Will blinked slowly at him, simply wondering why he wasn’t getting kissed right now. Could he make himself any more goddamn available?

“Do *you* want to talk about the Ripper?” Will asked incredulously. “Now? Here? Tonight?”

“I thought it was your favorite subject,” Hannibal quipped, looking like he wished he could double reinforce his suit of emotional armor instead of letting Will strip it off.

That’s it! I’ve had it. Will’s eyes flashed bright blue fire at the older man, who looked intimidated at the change in Will’s demeanor.

“I have something important to tell you,” Will smirked, “I’ve discovered the Ripper’s true identity. I know the name of the man I love. Soon, I’ll go to him and let him know exactly

how much he gets to have of me – namely, he gets *all* of me, forevermore. Just for him. Would you like to hear his name?"

"Yes, I would," said Hannibal huskily, moving towards Will with slowly seductive care, *finally* freaking going in for the kiss as Will pretended to be doing the same, too irritated now to let it happen that way.

"His name," Will whispered, painfully close to Hannibal's gorgeous lips, ghosting his breath over them in a tease. He tilted his face invitingly, then pulled back at the last second. "Is *Frederick Chilton*."

Will stood up so fast that Hannibal almost fell over; he'd been leaning that far into Will's space.

"Excuse me?" Hannibal demanded in a huff. "*What?*"

"What do you mean, 'what'? Frederick fits the profile." Will ticked qualities off his fingers proudly. "He's handsome, he's the right age, he has the medical know–"

"He's not a surgeon!" Hannibal was not shouting; he didn't shout; he was doing a low, gritty, accusing tone that shot right to Will's dick with shocking speed.

"So what?" Will asked, getting nice and sassy again. "He still went to medical school, knows anatomy and–"

"Don't you *dare* make romantic overtures with Frederick Chilton," Hannibal warned, pointing at Will as if the agent was a child to be scolded.

Will laughed, "Did you just point at me, Hannibal? I'm pretty sure that's rude. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"I have this to say." Hannibal stood up and knocked the chair to the floor, fueled by unstoppable fury and passion. He grabbed Will's face, stared into his eyes and said, "I'm the Ripper."

And he gave Will a searing, all-consuming, hot kiss full of tongue and teeth. Will threw his arms around Hannibal's neck eagerly, returning every press of lips, every delicious way Hannibal teased him with nibbles and licks. He was hard now, throbbing for more. First, though…

"I know you're the Ripper, Hannibal," Will explained, getting a vice grip on Hannibal's face between urgent kisses.

Hannibal paused, one hand tugging frantically at Will's curls, the other on Will's low back with an obvious intention of moving downward within seconds. His lips were swollen from so much kissing already, with indentations of Will's teeth in the lower one.

"You do? You did, before I confessed?"

“Yes,” Will smirked, and kissed Hannibal’s neck, unzipping his sweater and shoving it off. “You idiot. I have known it almost from the beginning and have been falling in love with you ever since. I wanted to know what it would take to get you to admit you love me. To stop…” He squeezed Hannibal’s face tighter. “*Lying* to me. I suppose jealousy was the final straw, hmm?”

“I do love you, brilliant, infuriating boy,” Hannibal growled. “You made me so jealous, I believed I would go insane.”

He turned his face as Will loosened his grip, only to feel Hannibal’s sharp teeth biting his hand, then his wrist.

“Oh, God,” Will gasped, “That’s it. Give in, show me how you feel–”

Hannibal picked Will up and conveyed him to bed with no further preamble, looming above the younger man with a predatory, starving look. Then, he unbuttoned his shirt and threw it aside. It was so sexy, Will could barely even stand to look, yet there was no chance of him looking away. *Holy fuck*...

“All the while you could have just told me the truth,” Will insisted, running his fingers through Hannibal’s soft chest hair, then playing with his nipples, moaning at the feeling, touching Hannibal intimately as he’d always desperately wanted to.

Hannibal crushed their bodies together, all heat and breathless kisses, grinding their clothed cocks like restless animals. And weren’t they, after all?

“Why couldn’t you come out and say you knew the truth?” Hannibal laughed, his stress melting into pure love and lust.

He buried his face in Will’s long, pale neck and began marking him with bites, slow, hard, firm ones that had Will reeling in pleasured pain, clinging to him and moaning.

“Because,” Will said when Hannibal had given him three large love bites and then started kissing his lips again, feverishly. “I’m tired of being the one who always does the confessing. The one who makes a move. I could never have survived you rejecting me. I wanted you to care enough to be real with me, risk it all. And you have. But do you mean it?”

“I’ve never meant anything more, my stubborn boy.” Hannibal sighed in disbelief. “I cannot fathom what you must have thought of me, all those weeks of sessions, you knowing exactly what I’d been up to in my spare time…”

“Visiting my dreams?” Will raised his eyebrows and flipped them, settling on top of Hannibal and writhing in the right way to make pleasure course through them both in a tormenting rush. They needed to be naked, five minutes ago.

“If I can’t do that literally, trust that I will always make your dreams come true,” Hannibal vowed more seriously. “You are my dream, after all, darling. Look at you. My beauty. You’re stunning, and you’re open to your darkness. Fallen angel. Fall with me.”

Will found it easier to follow this command than any other. Hannibal took him over completely, whipping their remaining clothes off with playful grins and wickedly serious, lustful looks at Will's nakedness.

"What does it feel like to be pure perfection?" Hannibal asked softly when they finally intertwined without a single stitch of clothing between them.

Will's heart raced; his cock was desperately alert and leaking. He needed Hannibal so badly, needed what he'd waited so impatiently for.

"You should be able to tell me," he answered, lovestruck and smiling, reaching out for more embraces, more kisses and stroking hands.

It culminated poetically as they turned in the sheets, tangling them until the sun had gone down outside without their noticing. Hannibal held Will down and kissed the living daylights out of him, then sucked and bit his nipples, soaking up every wanton cry he evoked with delighted approval.

"That's a good boy," Hannibal praised, noting how Will blushed even redder. "Hmm. I thought you would like that. It's only the truth, after all…"

With that, he moved down the bed and bit at Will's thighs, parting them, admiring every soft, pale curve as he had admired every hard bulge of muscle, and now, finally, Will's sizable erection.

Hannibal's eyes darkened and he enveloped Will in his warm, sultry mouth, moving up and down right away, sucking. Will clung to the pillow under his head and then had to bite his own hand in between prayer-like incantations of Hannibal's name. Hannibal licked and sucked at him like the man possessed he clearly was, and then he softly, but deliberately asked if Will had lube.

By the time Hannibal had two fingers deep inside him, slowly, expertly opening him as he sucked Will's cock, the profiler had no way to hold this overflow of pleasure inside. He came on a jagged cry, helplessly shaking as Hannibal rewarded this by finger-fucking him and sucking him even harder, swallowing every drop of his release, then groaning delightedly at how "tight, perfect, heavenly" Will's body felt, how good Will tasted, absolutely everywhere.

And Hannibal should know. He had tasted every inch of Will's body he could get his mouth on, marking many areas with bites and sucking bruises, decorating Will to his heart's content, marking him, so it was clear to whom he belonged. Will writhed under this loving care, feeling the fusion of Hannibal's tender nurturing and the Ripper's brutal intensity, falling even deeper.

A vision of his stagman appeared above him when Hannibal pressed his thick cock slowly deep inside Will's tight entrance. Will stared up into the bleak, pitch black eyes, grasped his beast's low back and urged him deeper, and then the vision undulated, shifting back to Hannibal's form.

“I see you, Hannibal,” he sighed, on the highest cloud of pleasure and sinking to the deepest abyss of hellish sin. “I love all of you.”

“I love you, my Will.” Hannibal looked torn apart with pleasure and a happiness he’d never dreamed possible. He pressed his forehead to Will’s, breathing hard as he stayed buried to the hilt and murmured, “Any concept I had of pleasure before this night was nothing. Nothing at all.”

“You really want me this much,” Will said, a statement of fact, even if his voice was a weak, breathy moan. Hannibal felt so enormous, so warm and claiming inside him, just as he’d wanted, but much better in reality.

“And more.” Hannibal gazed at him as he began to move, making Will’s eyes roll back as the bliss in his body mounted uncontrollably.

He had no defense against it, this onslaught of pleasure, and Hannibal, his Ripper, had all the power over him.

“More,” Will answered, clawing at Hannibal’s back, looking at him with demanding hunger, “And more.”

“You want a love to suffocate you, never let you go,” Hannibal guessed.

“Yes,” Will admitted, crying tears of ecstasy.

Hannibal turned them and took Will from behind, holding Will’s back to his torso and slamming in ruthlessly, the snap of his hips and the slapping of their naked skin making an obscene sound. Kissing Will’s neck obsessively, he said in a savage, low tone, “You could never hope to escape my love now that I’ve had you. I’ll never release you. You’ll die before you evade my clutches. You are *mine,* Will Graham.”

With that, he grasped Will’s cock and stroked him knowingly, while speeding up his devastatingly deep thrusts, again and again. They came almost in unison, moaning each other’s names, falling together, golden-tanned hands sliding down ivory thighs and gripping firm biceps.

Hannibal could not stop touching or kissing Will, not while he was awake and capable.

Will ended up sinking into the bed contentedly, intending to fall asleep, but Hannibal was still kissing him, still caressing him all over, and it felt better than ever. Now that Will was so unbearably sensitive…Hannibal’s every touch was wildfire on his skin, burning him alive. And Hannibal knew it.

Finally, Will had the stagman’s sleek, long, sharp claws holding him tightly, had Hannibal’s sweetest and most demanding kisses, fingers in his curls, fangs in his skin. And Hannibal had the luscious boy of his dreams, all for his very own.

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“So, you actually went after that guy…for not walking me back to my car?” Will asked as they cuddled with a between-sex-sessions snack.

In his fridge, Will had been relieved to discover not the void of despairing emptiness which it often was, aside from his meticulously homemade dog food, but a bunch of red grapes and some deli meat, plus cheese to make decent little sandwiches. Happily, he’d done a recent grocery run.

When Will came back to bed, wearing nothing but Hannibal’s shirt and a shy, blushing smile, he noticed that Hannibal seemed charmed by his offering of food, not a snobbish attitude in sight.

The gift of homemade food, created and offered with affection, and especially coming from the man he loved, carried special, deep meaning to Hannibal; the type of food itself, while fine, was not important compared to the symbolism of the act.

Will sipped some water held out by Hannibal in a reminder that he really must stay hydrated, as the night was still very young.

Regarding Dave’s “sad” fate, Hannibal remained righteously indignant.

“Firstly, not walking you back to your car was horribly rude by even the most lax standard of etiquette. And then it was worse – he did this when you were – due to his own selfish demands – in a strange neighborhood, all by yourself? With violent criminals lurking in the shadows?” Hannibal reminded him, scowling at poor, dead Dave.

Will bit his lip to help from crying with laughter. *Jesus.* Anyone would think that Hannibal himself was not a violent criminal from the way he talked. As usual, the man had completely different rules for him and Will than for the lower ranks of humanity, i.e. everyone else.

Hannibal smiled as Will swept a lock of silvery hair behind his ear and then caressed his face. “There is only so much a man can take, Will. I consider my tolerance to most irritating circumstances to be quite high.”

“You…uh, do?” Will blinked at him with a playful look. Really? The man who killed people regularly for rudeness?

“You don’t know how often I am offended and do not respond with violence,” Hannibal explained loftily, proud of his self-restraint.

“I see,” Will said, only able to half-repress the next giggle. “But really, tell me more about needing to avenge my honor and all that.”

Hannibal smirked, knowing Will enjoyed how his lover worshiped him. “Once my capacity for love was dragged from its cage by your existence, my feelings ran extremely hot. At such times, the heat I feel may burn destructively. To be specific, I have an exceedingly low tolerance to your being treated badly, including disrespect, including rudeness and especially if you have been put in harm’s way. If you have been hurt by another’s hands? I have no pity

for the perpetrators, even as I squeeze the life from them and crush their skulls beneath my heel."

"Low tolerance?" Will repeated, amused at Hannibal's over-the-top protectiveness, feeling a bit vain at being the one to bring it out, and all in all? Euphoric at being loved by this man he adored.

Will wanted to hear even more about it, in fact.

"Yes." Hannibal kissed the top of Will's head and nuzzled in, smelling his hair. Lifting his face, he admitted with a small shrug, "In fact, it may be subterranean."

***

"I can see now that my procrastination was dreadfully foolish," Hannibal admitted during the third round of breathtaking sex.

"It was," Will grinned, sweating and panting. "Why did you put it off?"

Yes, he wanted to hear it again. He could never get enough of Hannibal's passion. Lucky for him, as he'd always hoped and believed, Hannibal's love was an unending, bottomless cup of ruby-red, drowning devotion, always spilling over him.

Hannibal confessed, "I was afraid of how much I love you. I'm not going to be afraid anymore, darling, I promise."

"Then, you'd better show me how much you love me, Hannibal, if you expect me to buy that," Will begged, "Exactly how much. I'm not sure I heard you properly the last time."

Hannibal smiled, enchanted by his lover's besotted requests.

"Let me repeat it, then," he murmured, kissing, stroking, clutching, turning Will inside out with pleasure. "I love you," he began, slowly, then more firmly, louder, "I love you," again and again…past the break of dawn and into their new life together.

End Notes

Thanks for reading! 🖤🌹
Story Playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5KAkPN9k9RX16FQz3GC308?si=7ce87081c1ee45b1

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